



Skills management for the future

One of the biggest challenges facing organizations today is the emergence of an age-diverse, attention-challenged and hard-to-hire workforce that is the result of three distinct trends: demographics, changing attitudes, and skills specialization. Consequently, there is an

ongoing reduction in the concept of the physical workplace, with the Internet becoming the corporate backbone of this workforce.

We are experiencing the longest employee lifespan within the workplace ever. The reasons for this? People are entering the workforce younger, while others are staying longer. These extreme-end generations represent unique attitudes and recruitment challenges for the future.

A US study by *Credit Union Magazine* suggests that almost half of all young adults aged 15 years and older work enough hours in the week to be considered full-time employees. Managing these kids — whom

I call Gen-Connect, as they have been wired with a mouse since birth — will prove to be a challenge. Countless surveys show that Gen-Connecters reject the concept of having a career and that longevity isn't in their lexicon.

Another survey, by the *Hills Shire Times*, an Australian newspaper, indicates 63% of the current Gen-Y workers stay with an employer for less than two years, while 52% of Gen-Y workers think it is easy to find a new job. We can expect the Gen-Connect generation to have a similar if not more extreme attitude; they know they are in the driver's seat regarding career control, and think nothing of bouncing from project to project and from career to career. Retention and keeping Gen-Connecters occupied will prove to be the biggest issue. And since they are wildly plugged in and globally collaborative, online work teams will replace the concept of a physical workplace.

On the flipside, baby boomers headed for the joys of retirement will rapidly discover that the concept of retirement has come to an abrupt end. Indeed, many will continue to be engaged in the workforce long past the age of 65, and for three key reasons. First, employers need their

skills — we simply can't have millions of baby boomers leaving the North American economy simultaneously. Second, baby boomers are living longer, desire stimulating activities beyond gardening and reading, and are seeking part-time careers to stay intellectually occu-

pied. Last, many baby boomers will discover that pension planning doesn't presume age longevity or spending demands and will require regular incoming funds. All of this is happening within the context of massive and ongoing skills specialization, to the point where organizations will find it impossible to attract the people they need amidst this age-diverse workforce. As professions and skills fragment into tightly defined niches, organizations will discover they need innovative recruitment strategies.

As a result, new solutions will transpire. Companies that have a physical workplace will realize the need for telephones with big buttons and safety rails in bathrooms for the 70-years-plus folks who are part of their workforce. The office safety ergonomics industry will surge.

And if, in this future, there still is a physical workplace, semi-retired boomers will be serving their corporate masters from the golf course via Blackberry — they will have discovered they don't need to be in the office to do the work. Similarly, the Gen-Connecters will seek unstructured, far-flung project teams that match their short attention spans. They are about to carve out a nomadic, part-time existence that will make previous virtual project teams seem pale. And, we can expect a lot of long-range part-time work relationships with organizations hiring the right skills at the right time for the right purpose from a globally nomadic and connected workforce.

Jim Carroll, FCA, is a well-known speaker, author and columnist. Reach him at jcarroll@jimcarroll.com or log on to his website at www.jimcarroll.com

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